

# Choosing a Postsecondary School



Adapted from *Preparing Your Child For College*, a publication of the US Department of Education.

**Postsecondary schools** are located in large cities, in suburbs, and in small towns throughout the country. Some are public institutions and some are private. Some enroll thousands of students, others have just a few hundred. Some have diverse student populations, and some focus attention on specific types of students. The type of institution best suited to you will depend on your needs and preferences. You can start your investigation by considering these basic questions:

- Why do I want to attend a postsecondary school?
- What do I hope to achieve?
- Do I have a specific major in mind?
- Do I prefer a small or a very large school?

Once you have an idea of your needs and preferences, you can continue your investigation by finding out more about potential schools. Many of the following questions can be answered by accessing Web pages for the schools.

**What kinds of educational programs are offered?** You can ask about the institution's best known or "specialty" programs, as well as the types of certifications or degrees available.

**How long does it take to earn a certificate or degree?**

Prior to enrolling in any program, you should know the average length of time it takes to graduate. Make sure you inquire as to whether the time reflects full-time or part-time attendance.

**What graduate follow-up information is available?**

- Find out about the job placement rates for graduates of programs in which you're interested. If a high percentage of graduates are working in an area unrelated to their program of study, there could be a problem.
- Ask about beginning salaries of graduates.
- Ask about career and placement services available to students.

- If you're looking to transfer from a 2-year college to a 4-year school, make sure you ask about the ease with which this can be accomplished. Ask about the number of graduates who transfer each year.

**What is the dropout rate at the school?**

A high dropout rate may indicate that students are dissatisfied with the education provided. You will also want to know about refund policies for students who drop out within the first few weeks of a program.

**What are the admissions requirements?**

Check to assure that you have completed any high school prerequisites and admissions tests.

**What is the loan default rate?**

The loan default rate is the percentage of students who took out a loan to help pay their school expenses, but did not repay them properly. A high default rate may suggest that students are not completing their training, or that they are unable to find jobs when they graduate.

What do recent graduates have to say about their experience at the school? Schools should give you the opportunity to talk to recent graduates – or perhaps current students – who can share their opinions about classes, teachers, facilities, and about the skills they have acquired through training.

**What facilities are available at the school?**

Consider the quality of the classrooms, libraries, and computer centers. Are they adequate to meet your needs? If you plan to live on campus, you will also want to visit the dorms to discover living conditions and meal arrangements there.

**How is the school accredited?**

Federal financial aid will only be available to students attending schools that are recognized by the Secretary of Education. (To check the status of a potential school, you can call the Student Financial Aid Information Center at 1-800-4FED-AID.)